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My name is Andrea Sambrook, and I am the Director and Owner of Annette's Preschool in Hinesburg. I am a child development specialist, a trainer of early educators, and the parent of two sons, one of whom is a transgender young man, now finishing his sophomore year of college. I support the proposed bill H333 to label all public single toilet rest rooms in Vermont as Gender Free or All Gender Restrooms. I support this bill because the language we use matters, because safe spaces matter, and because frankly, this bill can help save lives. For any of us who identify with the gender we were assigned at birth, the bathroom binary "choice" is a subconscious one. For any of us who are gender non-conforming, or identify other than male or female, the binary bathroom choice of M or F is arguably a very conscious one, fraught with anxiety relating to safety, social repercussions and a reminder of the lack of public acknowledgement that we even exist.

In my preschool, we strive to educate every child so each gets what they need as an individual. We refer to each other as "friends" and there are no gender lanes as to what children can wear, eat, do, or think. We read books together about Curious George, Harold and the Purple Crayon, Ada Twist Scientist, Introducing Teddy, The Quiltmaker's Gift, and Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress. In Harold and the Purple Crayon, Harold uses his crayon to shape his world and create an environment that feels safe. The common thread between them all? Fostering social emotional competence in childhood. The same set of life skills that helped all of us here in this room get to where we are today. It's likely that we were good at making friends, taking turns, expressing our feelings freely, and tolerating frustration on the road to adulthood. More often than not, we were encouraged to try, try and try again, to be creative, to find unique solutions to our problems, to value life-long learning and perhaps the most important differentiator, to feel the warmth of being accepted without reservation for who we are along the way. We likely developed the confidence that comes with the privilege of being visible, valued and heard in our formative years.

However, we know that there are youth who may not readily identify with a binary, male OR female rubric, or even with the gender they were assigned at birth. They may not have words for these feelings, and may feel shame, guilt or desperately fear rejection, instead. For these children, energy that could be channeled into learning is spent instead on hiding, covering up and denying this part of themselves that has no label or place with others. Rather, such children might effectively *retreat from* rather than *move toward* social emotional competence.

***Adrienne Rich once said, "...when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing."***

Over time, without the buffer of gender inclusive spaces such as Gender Free rest rooms, youth who continually "see nothing" in the proverbial mirror and often suffer from the effects of repeated social rejections, are increasingly more likely to join the ranks of the 40% of transgender and gender nonconforming youth who attempt suicide<sup>1</sup>. Now is the time to increase the number of gender inclusive spaces by voting for all single use toilets to be labeled as All Gender/Gender Free rest rooms in Vermont. The proposed bill H333 is a simple, cost effective step toward fostering social emotional competence and acceptance for *every Vermonter*. The minimal cost of signs cannot realistically outweigh the deep relief they grant to transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Their installation silently broadcasts the message "I see you, you exist and you matter."

A bathroom sign that acknowledges a gender inclusive space for youth not only serves everyone's most basic physiological needs, but reflects an inclusive community where everyone is visible, valued and heard. Know that YOU, the members of this committee, truly matter at a time such as this. H333 is an important opportunity to ensure that everyone has their own purple crayon, just like our friend Harold. Thank you for your consideration and work to make Vermont a healthier and safer state!

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<sup>1</sup> James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.